

Lessons Learned in Ministering to Others

Chaplain (Colonel) Vance P. Theodore
(U.S. Army Retired)



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Contact at coltheodore@gmail.com

*This booklet is dedicated to the
graduate students I have had the honor
to teach and the servicemembers that it
was a priviledge to serve.*

*May you enjoy your ministry and
selfless service to others in the armed forces
and always remember why you serve.*

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Foreword

When I joined the Chaplain Corp in the 90's there were not enough training slots, so the Army sent me to my first Chaplain assignment without first sending me to the chaplain officer basic course.

I felt somewhat overwhelmed by all the new things that a Chaplain needed to know in order to be effective. Even after receiving training, I continued to feel uneasy for many years. During this same time I witnessed many Senior Chaplains retire, the vast majority of which never wrote down “lessons learned” for the younger chaplains. I often thought it a great waste as they rode off into the sunset with a wealth of information left in their heads.

In this book, Vance has accomplished what I have wanted for so many years. He has captured decades of experience as an Army Chaplain and as a professor of Chaplaincy Education. As one of my mentors for the last

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two decades I know that Chaplain Theodore has modeled the ministry that he preaches.

Over the years he has provided me and many other Chaplains with wisdom and advice. He has not only allowed us to crash on his couch when visiting Ft. Bragg, he guided us along our careers as we faced very tough choices. He inspired us to be better servants of Christ in our ministry to Soldiers and their families.

I am excited about the lessons in this book that will likewise teach and inspire you in this special ministry called Chaplaincy!

Thomas S. Helms
Chaplain (Colonel)
United States Army
Executive Officer
Chief of Chaplains Office
Washington, D.C.

Preface

Being a chaplain in the armed forces can be a daunting task. All or most who serve feel the call; however, the chaplaincy doesn't come with a handbook or a guide that has all the answers.

Much of your career will be learned through the challenges and opportunities you will have in serving others in a dynamic environment that changes daily.

These short chapters provide advice concerning truths learned during more than two decades working as an army chaplain with the men, women and families in the armed forces. The chapters include personal experiences and stories, narrated with and about others who taught me valuable lessons.

I believe these lessons learned in ministering to others can, in a small way, help you as you navigate your career in the chaplaincy or in other areas of your life.

It is my prayer that your time in the chap-

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laincy will be filled with joy and that your ministry to others, though challenging and exciting, will be worthwhile.

This book is written with you in mind, so enjoy the lessons provided in these short chapters and, more importantly, enjoy the ride!

Chapter 1



Why We Serve and Minister to Others

The pamphlet read: *For those who want to serve and have tried to solve the world's problems through economic development and progress, we seek to improve the world through spiritual development.*

The leaflet went on to describe being a chaplain in the United States Army and stated that if you feel the call you should talk to your denomination for more information about being a chaplain in the armed forces.

We all have our stories of why we serve and what caused us to come into the chaplaincy. Each one of us has a different take on a similar theme: that of serving, ministering and being called by God.

However, as I read through the pamphlet, I wondered, "Did my denomination have chaplains"? The only chaplain that I was aware of was Father Francis Mulcahy from the 4077th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (M*A*S*H). He played a chaplain on a television sit-com who ministered to people of all faiths. I enjoyed watching this TV series where the chaplain

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would interact with the men and women of his unit.

My immediate family and I had just returned from Guatemala a few years earlier where we were involved in community development work.

We worked for an organization called *Ayuda* (Help). We lived in a small village in Guatemala and worked on community development projects. It was a worthwhile labor and I believed in the concept of appropriate community development.

As I read and pondered the pamphlet about the Army chaplaincy, I thought back to a conversation I had with a community elder who stood about four feet five inches tall, and who was dressed in the cultural garb of the K'iche Indians. He stopped me and asked me a question that changed how I looked at my career.

He said, "Why are you working with my people? Why don't you work with your own people?"

I was a bit taken back. We had worked in

the village for about a year, built a medical clinic, and created small schools for children. Doctors from the United States came to perform operations for those who could not afford certain medical procedures. Educators came to help with crops. I was even the ambulance driver for the village transporting the sick on a dirt road to a small city hospital two hours from our home. Perhaps it was more about me than them.

I thought about what he said, and though we did return later to the United States because of the political turmoil in Guatemala, his question nagged at me. Combine this experience with reading the Army chaplain pamphlet and it was like I had received the answer to his question: working on spiritual development as a chaplain with the men and women of the armed forces instead of economic development in other countries.

While in Guatemala, we had become friends with a couple who were providing medical assistance to the local population and

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were members of our religious denomination. The Kellys were good friends of our Church endorser of military chaplains and provided me with a recommendation as I applied to be considered as a chaplain and represent our church in the armed forces chaplaincy.

We all have our own stories or narratives for why we serve or minister to others. Remember, mine started in the highlands of Guatemala when asked a simple question that was answered by a leaflet about spiritual development in the army.

For others it could be about your pastoral identity or receiving inspiration about your call. It could also be a scripture, a small voice in the night, or an impactful event at a religious retreat.

However, it is our stories that will remind us of why and for what purpose we originally wished to minister and serve as chaplains and why we continue to minister and serve today.

Lessons Learned



- Your time as a chaplain will be filled with deployments, ministry and opportunities to bring God to servicemembers and service-members to God.
- The reason you were called to serve will help you through the years as you minister to the service men, service women and families of the armed forces.
- Remember the “reason” when your career becomes difficult or there does not seem to be enough light to guide your path.
- Your oath as a commissioned officer, and your duty to God and Country will help sustain you.
- Service is the chaplain’s keystone to ministry. Ministry to others coupled with service is the chaplain’s guidepost when feeling lost or overwhelmed by work, pastoral coun-

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selling, or time away from loved ones and friends.

- Losing oneself in service and ministry to others will help you to find yourself as you fulfill your vocation and ultimately your “call” to the men and women in uniform.
- Your selfless service to others will bring back cherished memories not to be forgotten, purpose to your soul, and remembered joy to your heart.
- Ministry to others will be your clarion call, and your daily actions will be your cadence.

Chapter 2



**It's Not About You; It's
About Those You Serve**

As we sat in class at the career course at the now closed Fort Monmouth, New Jersey Army chaplain school, our small group instructor told us that we were to bring our last four officer evaluation reports (OERs) to class the next day so that we could talk about our performance as officers.

This caused a buzz in our classroom and side conversations before the instructor could get back our attention. This was of great interest to the group because the report measured our potential for advancement in rank. The evaluation report allegedly showed our ability in leadership, physical fitness, character, and job performance.

It seemed that every six months we would have training on the structure of the OER: how to write one, what should go into an OER, what was considered a good evaluation for promotion, and what verbiage would prevent you from getting promoted.

I wasn't particularly interested in sharing my evaluations with this group of nine chap-

lains. In fact, it seemed that many officers obsessed over their OERs. This was sacred ground. What was the instructor thinking? These classmates were part of my peer group that I would compete against for promotion. Perhaps pride was raising its ugly head. I had worked hard over the last four years for these reports. What if I didn't measure up to my peers? I always said that your report shouldn't matter, that the Lord would take care of you. However, there was a part of me that secretly thought, "This report is good. I am sure this will put me ahead of my peer group."

There was the usual banter competing with an unusual amount of excitement that day as we walked into class. We were a tight group. We had been together in our career course for about three months.

The career course was the first step in our professional development as officers. Its purpose was to prepare us as staff officers and to develop our skills and competencies in supervision, to learn how to operate in operational

environments, and to improve our leadership and critical thinking.

Some of us had previously served together. We were a diverse group as to ethnicity, religion, and most definitely as to personalities. Each group had a small group leader. I smile when I think of our leader in the group. He always had a joke and liked to needle us to see whether he could get under our skins.

There was the quiet one. The one who had been in combat. Another who always had an opinion that was contrary to what was being taught. One was brilliant. And there was the ONE who we thought would be the next Chief of Chaplains. It was a fun group and our friendship was jelling.

Sitting down, I placed the folder that contained my OERs on the desk and noticed the others were doing the same. The instructor began the class with announcements and other information that was important for the day. The instructor then said, "I know this may be uncomfortable for some of you, or that you may

not want to share your evaluations with others. However, there is a lesson to be learned.”

He started with the first chaplain on his left. We were sitting in a square, where three chaplains sat at each long desk—east, south, and west. There was not a table in the northern position where the instructor stood in front of a whiteboard. He continued with, “I want to begin this exercise with you reading the first line of your OER from your Senior Rater.”

We began in succession reading as follows:

This chaplain is the finest chaplain with whom I have served in 18 years of active commissioned service. This chaplain is absolutely the best chaplain I have known in 20 years of service. This chaplain is the epitome of the Army chaplain, the best of the best. This chaplain is the finest, the very best U.S. Army chaplain I have known or served with in more than 20 years of service. This chaplain is the finest, the best chaplain that I have had the privilege to serve with in 19 years.

Then he asked us to read the second line of our OER. It went something like this: He is exceptional. He is outstanding. He is superior. He is without peers. Then he asked us to read the last line: Unlimited potential. Promote ahead of Peers. If I had one officer to promote today it would be this chaplain.

We all sat there for a moment stunned. Most of us had never read another chaplain's OER. I think we all thought we were the best of the best. It was like letting the air out of an inflated balloon. I am sure that the instructor noticed our body language. Then, he began to teach us. He said, "I hope you don't take your OERs too seriously. You are all fine chaplains and you will go far in your careers, but sometimes we tend to forget that it is not about us but those whom we serve, the men and women in uniform."

He continued the rest of the class talking about professionalism and taking care of those to whom we have been called to minister. He did end by lifting our spirits and encouraging

us to continue to work hard, but to put our careers and evaluation reports into perspective.

Over the years, I have thought about what he taught us. “The *you* needs to be taken care of, but much of our actions should focus on others.” This includes those who are most important to us, like family, loved ones, and friends. When you lose yourself in service, you tend to find your-self.

Perhaps the following three concepts, situational awareness, knowing yourself, and being flexible might help in understanding the phrase or truism *It's Not About You, It's About Those You Serve*.

As I walked behind the paratrooper from the 82nd airborne, I had a funny feeling. We were replacing the unit from Fort Bragg as part of a multi-national peacekeeping force implemented to keep the peace between the Egyptians and the Israelis. I was visiting one of the many observation posts where our soldiers, segmented in platoon size elements, would be

living. The soldier said, “Hey chaplain, make sure you follow in my footsteps.” We crossed over a barbed wire fence, and I followed this soldier. In about two minutes, we came to a pit. “Chaplain this is the left-over ordinance from the war.” In the pit was unexploded ordinance from the war, including mines. I nervously asked him where we were. “Chaplain, we are in a mine field.” “Are you sure we are safe?” I asked. “Don’t worry,” he said as he pulled out his knife and showed me how he searched the ground with his knife to make sure there weren’t any unexploded mines beneath the path where we had walked. I said quickly, “I need to get back to my unit.” “No problem, Chaplain.” I followed him carefully, again in his footsteps, back to where we began.

Even though, as chaplains, we are called to serve others, situational awareness is important as we serve the men and women in uniform. I should have known better. I didn’t really know this soldier. My gut was telling me something was wrong. I did not take the time

to assess the situation, ask the right questions, and understand my environment. Many times, if we are not aware of our surroundings, we can find ourselves in a mine field that we did not know was there. Such as not understanding the command climate, or pitting our commanders against our technical chain—chaplain supervisors.

As a young chaplain, I was caught in the middle of an argument between my division chaplain and commanding officer about moving me to another unit that was deploying. I had wished to stay with my current command, as I loved the people in this unit. As diplomatically as possible, I tried to suggest they work out the situation without asking me to take sides. In the end, they worked it out.

Socrates said to *know thyself*.¹ Chaplains spend a great deal of time working with commands, soldiers and families. Knowing who

¹ As cited in Plato, *Charmides* (164D), (see John M. Cooper, ed. *Plato. Complete Works* [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997], 649).

you are and being comfortable in your own shoes is critical in ministering to others.

Much of my time as a chaplain was spent in pastoral counseling or assisting others. Being aware of my own issues, my own painful experiences, and what I brought to the table helped me to be in touch with not only my own experiences but also others' experiences.

As a young chaplain, I tended to try to fix my soldiers' concerns. You might say I was a *Mister Fix It*. If they had a problem or an issue, I had a solution. This did not work very well. I learned that if I was a better listener, and that if I didn't have the answer to problems or issues, it was okay, as it was not my responsibility to fix it. Most people just want an individual who will listen, understand, and journey or walk with them in their grief, joy, sadness, or loss. Being comfortable in my own skin and being aware of my own biases or what issues made me uncomfortable helped me to be other focused instead of self-focused.

Considering the concept of being self-fo-

cused, here is another example. During my first year as a chaplain, I had a particularly difficult soldier who was sent to me weekly for counseling. He was labeled a malingerer. He did not want to be in the military, was having marital problems, and had a caustic personality. The unit was going to chapter him out, but in the meantime the 1st Sergeant probably wanted to keep him busy until he was out of the military.

While I was lead for a family support meeting one day, this soldier came and asked to talk right then. I was more concerned about the start of the meeting and told the soldier I wasn't available. The battalion commander noticed that I had been short with the soldier. As soon as the soldier left, the commander approached me "Chaplain, do you think that you can pick and choose who you want talk to? I thought you wanted to provide spiritual care to any soldier and family member of this unit. Perhaps you need to reconsider what it means to be a chaplain."

I was shocked and felt embarrassed. The commander reminded me that we shouldn't judge others and that we should journey with others in their walk, not our walk. Since that time, I have heeded his advice.

The train in the military never stops. There are constant deployments, field training exercises, late nights, staff meetings, problems, and ministry opportunities driven by events. Managing how you provide ministry to others is critical in an environment that is constantly on the move. Being aware of the situation, knowing who you are, and being comfortable in an environment that changes constantly for you as a chaplain can be challenging.

In another incident that taught me the principle of being flexible, the army had given me the opportunity to complete graduate studies at Kansas State in Marriage and Family Studies. After finishing the program, I was expecting to be assigned to a garrison where I would be running an installation family life center.

I loved the academic challenge, and it was fun studying with a cohort of five chaplains who were also slated to manage family life centers at different installations.

One of my good friends, Ron Hill, had just received his assignment to Wurzburg, Germany. We were all waiting with excitement to receive our assignments. Mine came a few days later. "Chaplain Theodore, you are being assigned to the School of the Americas as an instructor. You are being diverted from the family life track and will report to Fort Benning, Georgia."

I thought, "An instructor at a school house? What was the School of the Americas? What was the chaplaincy thinking?" I soon learned that I would be teaching human rights, ethics, and democratic sustainment to officers from Central and South America. Instruction was to be in Spanish. I had been a missionary in Guatemala and Salvador from 1972 to 1974. That was twenty years after my mission experience.

My Spanish was okay, but not for teaching graduate level courses.

I called my personnel officer. The conversation went something like this: the needs of the army. He explained that the chaplain corps was short on Catholic priests and that the billet had usually gone to a priest that was a Latino. I was the first Anglo to be assigned to the position. He assured me that I would be up to the challenge. He also reminded me that I needed to be flexible.

Years later, I found out how I had been selected for this position. The division chaplain for the 3rd Infantry Division stationed at Wurzburg, had a staff meeting with the community chaplain in Schweinfurt, Germany. As he passed by my office, he heard me counseling with a young couple in Spanish. I was told that he was present when the chaplain personnel officer was trying to decide whom to send to the School of the Americas. The 3rd division chaplain remembered that incident and recommended that I be assigned.

I spent three wonderful years at the School of the Americas. The friendships and opportunities for growth were incredible. Yes, my Spanish did improve, and the officers from Central and South America were truly honorable. They must have enjoyed my accent. They were always helping me with my Spanish content, sentence structure, and grammar.

I was an invited guest in their homes. I attended celebrations and family events, and helped matriculate their children into schools. I counseled with them, taught them, visited them when they were sick, and took them to weekly Catholic worship services. I ministered to them, and learned to love them and their cultures. They never called me chaplain, I was always referred to as Padre. It truly was not about me but about those whom I had the privilege to serve and to love.

Lessons Learned



- Serving others and not thinking about yourself is important. Certainly, the you also needs to be taken care of.
- Being aware of the situation is critical when you are tired, and the train of the military is always moving. However, there are times when the train stops at various loading and docking stations and allows you a few moments to breath (use your leave time!).
- Take advantage of these stops and precious moments. Spend time with family and friends, and always be flexible about assignments. If I had not been flexible concerning assignments, I would have missed incredible opportunities for growth and service to others. And yes, our expectations can make us angry and frustrated when they are not met. However, if we remind ourselves why we serve and who really is in charge, it helps us to see the big picture. This does not mean there will not be disappointments.

It's Not About You; It's About Those You Serve

- It's not about you it's about those you serve” is a multilayered truism. Its many meanings will grow as you progress in your careers, take care of yourself, and serve to the best of your ability.

Chapter 3



Ministry of Presence or Presence in Ministry

As I finished reading from Psalm 21, Gustavo passed away. As a chaplain, I had been called to be with the WW II veteran during his last moments. Clair, Gustavo's wife, was still holding his hand, saying what a good person he had been. I could see the powerful love that this woman of 81 years held for her husband and wondered at the trials, joys, and experiences these two people had shared over the years. Clair thanked me for the visit. Perhaps, it was I who should have thanked her. She sent me a lovely card, and I was grateful for the few moments that I had spent with the two of them.

Walking down the hall as I left the hospital, I briefly examined what our training had been for the month. One of the chaplains had commented that ministry of presence is more than just walking around and visiting with your soldiers, it is being present in the moment. Was I present in that moment?

Ministry of presence is one of the staples of the chaplain corps. It means being where your

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servicemembers are. It is sharing their trials whether it is jumping out of an airplane, being on the flight deck, performing deck plate ministry or being in the field. It's paying attention to the training schedule and planning out your ministry so that you can have opportunities to interact with the men and women in uniform daily.

I remember one of my chaplain friends from the 7th infantry division who would carry a Moses stick when he was in the field. He told me once that it gave him a certain amount of presence, and it provided a conversation piece. Another chaplain, Mark Brienholt, shared this story about presence with his soldiers.

It was two o'clock in the morning and I knew that my soldiers were going on a night road march. I grabbed my rucksack and joined in the 25-mile march. I wondered if it was worth my time. It was so dark that we could hardly see each another. After a few miles we stopped for a rest. I sat down next to a few soldiers. I overheard one of

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the soldier's conversation. "Hey, did you see that the chaplain is with us." "No," said his friend. "But I am sure glad he is."

That one conversation set the tone for his ministry throughout his career. Wherever his soldiers were, he was present: in the field, at the firing range, during tactical battle drills, at the hospital. He was present in their lives.

A Navy chaplain, Justin Topp, felt that the mere presence of a chaplain can change the tone of a meeting. Among other things, the chaplain helps lessen tension.

The following input from three senior chaplains: Navy Robert Vance, Captain Chaplain , Air Force Colonel Chaplain Kleet Barclay and Chaplain (COL) Thomas Helms explain ministry of presence as follows:

Chaplain Vance: *When I reflect on the term "Ministry of Presence," two distinctly different, yet connected principles come to mind. The first is to 'be there', to be the person who is with another and experi-*

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encing one of life's many events. For some it is a joyous occasion and for others the most heart-wrenching news they may ever receive. At times it is to be a silent witness to a moment in time that will never be forgotten. To share in a smile, a word, a thought, a groan or a tear. The second principle is to bring a Presence to the interaction, that Presence being the Spirit of God, the healing balm, the love of a Heavenly Parent who wants nothing more than to see His sons and daughters return to His presence. Hope, redemption, peace. To minister His Presence to others. Tangible and Intangible, earthly and Divine...Ministry of Presence is both.

Chaplain Barclay: *Ministry of presence is easier said than done. To me, ministry of presence could also be couched within the term "ministry of significance." It is somewhat easy to be physically, mentally, and even emotionally present, but it is not easy to always have one's presence be spiritually noteworthy to those in the area. I*

have seen chaplains seek to be like those they are called to serve. For example, if a chaplain's responsibilities are within the Special Forces (SF) community, the chaplain may be tempted to be like the SF personnel--meaning the chaplain seeks to do the same things as the highly trained operators, rather than let them be the professionals while the chaplain focusses on refining chaplain related skills and abilities. In order to fit in chaplains may be tempted to say inappropriate things, listen to offensive jokes, or ignore immoral behaviors because it is acceptable within the culture of the unit and "the way it is around here." However, when it comes to ministries of presence chaplains must learn to walk the fine line of being accepted into distinctive communities, without forgetting, putting aside, or diminishing the unique role of a chaplain.

As a young chaplain I worked with Air Force Special Operations and was in Thailand for a large international military

exercise. While there I met a more experienced Army chaplain serving with Delta Force personnel. The chaplain shared how much he loved his guys and respected the complexity and importance of their mission but he could not, and would not always be totally in sync with them. He would often pray with the teams before they left, and then be praying for their welfare and protection during their missions. He would also be in the operations control center when important and dangerous missions were taking place. In the operations center the leadership could sometimes watch what was happening or hear the audio feed of the actual mission. The chaplain would be there with the leadership, experiencing similar anxious and concerned emotions regarding the team's welfare, progress, or challenges. When (if) the team completed its objectives and successfully exfiltrated there would be cheers in the operations center and the chaplain shared in the emotions of those

moments with others in the room. However, if the mission involved the taking of life, the chaplain said he would not cheer with the others. He would excuse himself from the area because even though he was happy for the team and their mission success, he could not cheer as a life was taken from one of God's children; for "even the enemy is a child of God." Later, sometimes years later, a trusted chaplain whose presence is valued may be called upon by those highly trained operators as they seek to work through the emotional and spiritual trauma of such activities.

Chaplains need to remember, that commanders, the military, the United States, their church, and their families need them to be chaplains, not special operators, not military police, not aircrew, not submariners, not infantryman, etc. If chaplains cross the line and become like the tactical specialists they support, then a commander no longer has a chaplain, but another spe-

cialist. As chaplains we are to represent the Holy to those around us, and bring the reality, goodness, and hope of the Holy to a struggling world.

Unfortunately, it may not be uncommon to hear individuals say vulgar or inappropriate things. Sometimes the offending individuals may say “close your ears chaplain” or “sorry chaplain, I did not know you were there.” Certainly, the latter statement is more appreciated than the former, but ministry of significance means that over time, a chaplain is able to impact an individual, or a unit, in such a way that they no longer participate in the vulgarities, immoralities, or inappropriate comments. Often when people apologize to me for saying offensive things in my presence, I let them know that I appreciate their consideration. Then I tactfully add, that consideration of God is much more important than me, and God is always present and always knows what they are saying or doing.

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Idyllically, a ministry of significance means that even if a chaplain is not physically present, the unit is so positively impacted by the chaplain's ministry/presence that they learn to self-correct and hold each other accountable. Frequently, there are individuals within units that want to live a higher standard, or be in an environment that welcomes higher standards. A chaplain who has a ministry of significance may a key person that is able to empower others to stand for what is right and improve the unit atmosphere. Undoubtedly, making such a difference is not a quick process, but through consistent uplifting behavior ministry of presence is a welcome addition for all.

Chaplain Helms: *Chaplains provide many different services and capabilities to their Commanders. However, the number one thing that most commanders want from their Chaplain is to make life better for their Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines. They expect*

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their Chaplains to know everyone, and to engage where they are most needed. They want Chaplains who are engaged in a ministry of presence.

As I have watched the ministries of literally hundreds of Chaplains over the last couple of decades I have witnessed the bad, the good, and the phenomenal.

On the bad side I have witnessed Chaplains who are self-centered and seldom wonder far from their Chapels or offices. I remember witnessing a Senior Chaplain refusing to go to the Wake of his Soldier who had just died because he wanted to have dinner with his hockey buddies instead. I have seen a small number of Chaplains who refuse to respond to the emergency calls of their Soldiers at night or on the weekends because they want “a break.” And I have seen Chaplains find something else to do when their units go to the field for training.

On the other hand, I have witnessed great acts of selfless service from Chaplains

who are truly engaged with their stewardship. I remember in particular a Chaplain from Arlington National Cemetery who did many funerals every week. What made his ministry so amazing was his willingness to follow-up with grieving families well into the future to ensure that they were cared for. I also remember one of my Female Chaplains who had just returned from two hard field rotations with Armored Battalions to the National Training Center in Fort Irwin California. She lived, slept, and ate in the field with her folks in the most inhospitable climates that bordered Death Valley California. I was particularly touched when she agreed to go on a third rotation when a unit was in need. She was willing to forsake personal comfort in order to share compassion and shared hardships with her troops.

Although Sunday Preaching ministry is vital, perhaps a Chaplains' biggest impact comes from visiting the motor pool, being at

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physical fitness training, visiting hospital, prisons, or homes.

Chaplains who are engaged with a vibrant ministry of presence are simply following the example of the Master. It is amazing that the Creator of the World was willing to come down to Earth and walk humbly among his creations! Jesus of Nazareth truly set the example of what it means to have a ministry of presence. He was on the road, in the villages, inside houses, and on boats. His ministry was literally with the people. He walked, ate, and lived among them. And the most touching stories in scripture tell of this personal ministry.

Ministry of presence as a chaplain concept can be intentional or unintentional. The very act of being a chaplain in the armed forces opens doors and gives you the opportunity to serve. Religious symbols on your uniform act as a passport to the agencies, units, and support entities that make up the armed forces.

However, this concept of presence should

be respected. This means that your presence is not there to bother those you serve, or that you are present because you don't have anything else to do.

Chaplains need to be sensitive to the training schedule and the unit mission, and then plan out appropriate ministry that is time sensitive, mission oriented, and intentional.

The concept of ministry of presence will remain an important aspect of your ministry throughout your career. How it is implemented will depend on your personality, faith tradition, and creativity.

Lessons Learned



- Ministry of presence is part of you being present in your ministry. It can be as simple as being sensitive to the needs of those you serve, not overstepping another's time, and not abusing the religious symbols on

Ministry of Presence or Presence in Ministry

your uniform by expecting to be listened to, attended, or served.

- Ministry of presence, as a belief, provides you the privilege to walk with those who suffer, advise those with concerns or questions, listen and understand those in pain, and rejoice with those who are joyful.
- Your presence should be significant. You do not have to participate in all that your service-members do. You can rejoice in their accomplishments and remove yourself when necessary or be silent when appropriate.
- Take time to intentionally plan out your presence.
- People don't have to remember your name. All they need to remember is that the chaplain was present.

Chapter 4



Know When to Turn Off Your Heart Valve

As a young chaplain, my first assignment was with the 7th Infantry Division out of Fort Ord, California. I remember the first day I drove along the scenic Highway 1 to Monterey. You could smell the sea breeze and see the ocean and the waves as they pounded on the beach. I had just finished the officer basic course at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey where I spent six months learning how to put on a uniform, salute and learn some of the intricacies of being a chaplain.

I was excited. This was the beginning of a new career, and I was looking forward to my time as a chaplain with the 7th Infantry Division whose motto was “Light, Silent, and Deadly.” Assigned to the 13th Engineer Combat Light Battalion, I was eager to serve the men, women and families of the armed forces.

I was also worried. Was I up to the challenge? Nonetheless, my first year was exhilarating as I was learning what it meant to be an Army chaplain.

No matter how much I loved my time with

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the Engineers, it would soon be cut short due to an incident with a Lieutenant Colonel (LTC).

I remember standing in a soaking rain at Hunter Liggett, California. We were in the field training for about 30 days, and I was providing religious support during the exercise. Visiting our battalion was LTC Tom Kelley, who was going to be the commander of a new cohort light infantry unit.

The cohort unit was a new concept for the Army. It consisted of about 400 enlisted, non-commissioned officers and officers. These men came from units like the Rangers, Special Forces, Airborne, and other combat units to form the light infantry units of the 7th Infantry Division.

The purpose of the cohort was to create a unit that would stay together during a three-year life cycle providing a cohesive unit where the men trained, suffered together, and learned to rely on one another.

As I was standing in the mud and rain in my combat gear with other soldiers around a

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50 gallon can that we put wood in to make a fire and warm ourselves, LTC Kelley stopped and asked me what we were doing. I explained that we had been in the field for about 30 days and we were participating in various engineering drills. He was curious and asked whether I always went to the field with my soldiers? I replied that I did. There were no other questions, and he went on his way with the other officers touring the training site.

Soon after that experience, I was reassigned from the 13th Combat Light battalion, to become the battalion chaplain of the 5/21 Light Infantry Attack Battalion. My commander was the same LTC Kelley that I met in Hunter Liggett, California. I was selected because of the conversation we had in the field while the two of us were getting soaked by the rain.

My time with the 5/21 Infantry battalion was exciting, challenging, and at times exhausting. One day the battalion executive officer called me into his office. He was sitting

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behind his desk. The flags of past commands and memorabilia adorned the walls giving notice to all who bothered to look, where he had served. He was an impressive individual. He looked the part of a ranger/infantry officer, and he demanded excellence from his staff. He looked wearily at me, which made me nervous, and out of the corner of my eye I saw one of our unit's mottos emblazoned on the wall, "We own the night."

During that moment, I didn't feel like I owned the night. In fact, I was having trouble sleeping at night. There was too much pain, too much sorrow, heartbreak, divorces, relationship problems, faith challenges, and drug and alcohol problems. In fact, I felt like the world was getting out of control, and all the unit's problems were coming to my door for advice.

I had a feeling that I was in for a talk. I was right. The executive office of the battalion started with, "Chaplain, I just wanted to have a talk. You seem to be burning the candle at both ends. You don't seem as chipper as you

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used to. The chaplain is an important part of this cohort unit, and if the chaplain is down, it affects the morale of the soldiers.” I didn’t know what to say. However, he wasn’t done with his advice.

“Chaplain, you know something? You need to know when to turn off your heart valve. You can’t take the entire unit’s problems on by yourself, and you need to learn when to turn it on and when to turn it off, or you won’t make it.” I was startled, and for a few seconds I didn’t know what to say. He ended the conversation with, “That will be all.”

I walked out of his office confused, but the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. Since that time as a young chaplain with the 7th Infantry Division, I have deployed many times, serving in Iraq, Honduras, Panama, and the Sinai. I have also served at various installations throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. His words stayed with me during my entire career and made a significant impact on my ministry.

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I believe what he was saying was to not let another's problems become your problems, to not be burdened by all the traumatic material that chaplains deal with daily. What he meant was to take care of my heart, to learn the difference between what was help, and what was interference.

He helped me understand that I wasn't responsible for another's pain and that I didn't have to solve the world's concerns. He knew that if I didn't take care of my heart, I would not be healthy enough to help others. He wanted me to be compassionate, but I had to have enough left in the tank at the end of the day for others—like my own family. He wanted me to learn the difference between trying to solve the problems of my soldiers, and helping them to solve their own problems. He wanted me to understand the big picture, and that I couldn't save everyone. This did not mean that I did not care or feel with those who were in pain, or mourn for those who suffered losses, or even rejoice for another's achievements. It

meant that my heart valve could pump efficiently and that I could serve others without becoming a burden. He did not want me to become a casualty.

Lessons Learned



- This one important lesson, I believe, is essential in ministering to others. Learning how to take care of one's heart valve was an invaluable lesson. It allowed me to walk with those who suffer, provide a ministry of presence, and to exercise spiritual care in a non-judgmental way.
- This wise advice from my executive officer many years ago, helped me to once again, "own the night."

Chapter 5



The Truth Is Somewhere in the Middle

The community chaplain enjoyed running. As his deputy community chaplain, I was asked, on more than one occasion, to join him in the morning as we ran through the countryside of Schweinfurt, Germany.

This was a time when he could mentor me, relax (used figuratively since to some running is not relaxing), and figure out the religious issues of the community. He also loved conversing about theology.

Because he was a Lutheran chaplain, his talks about faith and justification were fascinating. He loved to point out that the Reformation would not have happened if it had not been for Paul and his letters to the Romans and Galatians, in that Paul stressed the spirit of grace over the law or the legalism of the scriptures.

I would point out to him that justification was a legalistic term. He would ignore me, which brought a smile to my face. “Mind you,” he would say, “Luther was an important historical and religious figure, but still the Pauline

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letters are what fueled his imagination.” It was fun bantering back and forth with him about theology and how we could better provide religious support to the community.

A kind, funny and faithful chaplain, he was always ready with a quip and loved to play his banjo, and sing in the choir. Music must have been the balm of gilead to his soul.

I remember one day when I had a difficult counseling session. He noticed that I looked preoccupied and troubled. We didn’t get into the particulars because of confidentiality, but he would remind me that the truth was somewhere in the middle.

I could talk about doing contracts or trying to solve a concern with one of the younger chaplains, or any complex issue. He would without hesitation remind me that the truth was somewhere in the middle. Many times, this saying would make me laugh because I knew what he was going to say if something was problematic. Didn’t he have any other advice that he could give me? If truth be told, I

thought that this maxim was rather simplistic. How could the truth be somewhere in the middle? What or where was the middle? “Middle” was an interesting word with many connotations like: smack dab in the middle; middle of nowhere; in the middle of something; play both ends against the middle; caught in the middle, middle ground, the middle of the road, etc. The word “somewhere” was equally as vague. And truth was a rather subjective term. I usually would turn my mind off when I intuitively knew he was about to say it.

However, as I began to mature in the chaplaincy, I found that I was saying this phrase to the chaplains that I was now supervising. Perhaps there was more to it than I thought. I think that it means that complex issues or human relations or difficulties with conflict are not simplistic. It has to do with seeing all the sides of an issue. It meant that one should not jump to conclusions, and that first appearances, without all the information, can cause one to be wrong. It's kind of like sleep-

The Truth Is Somewhere in the Middle

ing on it. It means to not let the emotions of the issue consume you or get in the way. It means to walk a mile in another's shoes. It can also mean to look at alternative ideas or, as they say in the military, watch avenues of approach. The middle ground can often be the safe ground especially when there are dangerous cliffs that surround you. The truth can also vary according to perspective.

Concerns are not always black and white. In thinking about truth and the middle, one should weigh all the evidence, patterns of behavior, and move towards balance. Extremes in behavior or thoughts are difficult to sustain and normally we find ourselves somewhere back in the middle.

Lessons Learned



- The lessons learned from this phrase can vary, but it may help you to stop and think

The Truth Is Somewhere in the Middle

or at least pause when thinking about complex issues.

- At the very least, it can help you to ponder and to see life's challenges through a different lens. Maybe it is rather simplistic, but when life gets hectic, when issues are troubling or seem impossible to resolve, perhaps the truth is somewhere in the middle.
- I think that this chaplain, if he knew, would feel vindicated in his mentoring and smile that this idiom had such an impact on my life and ministry.

Chapter 6



Mentorship: Don't Be a Lone Ranger

The staff meeting with the brigade chaplain was about to end. He suddenly said, “Don’t be a lone ranger.” What did he mean by being a lone ranger? Was he referring to the iconic figure who wore a mask, rode a horse, and fought against injustice? He went on to say, “As a chaplain you need to be a team player. During your career, the chaplaincy will place you in positions of responsibility where you can grow in your ministry to others, and where you will supervise other chaplains and develop a vision of team ministry.”

He continued, “There is one member of our team who never comes to meetings, who always has an excuse and feels that it is more important to always be with his unit. Perhaps, he doesn’t feel the need to be mentored or supervised.”

I knew whom he was talking about. He was a good chaplain. But, on several occasions, he had mentioned that the meetings were a waste of his time, and that he had better things to do. I wondered if I would ever be a *lone chaplain*.

Mentorship: Don't Be a Lone Ranger

As I sat in the post chaplain's office at Fort Riley, Kansas, I had an idea of why I was there. One of the chaplains had refused an assignment to Panama because he was nervous about the political situation there. We talked for a few minutes about life, the family, and how I was doing. Then he commented that he needed a chaplain to be part of the security enhancement mission to Panama. The deployment was for six months. He knew that I spoke Spanish, and he felt this would be a good mission for me.

He also knew that I was leaving the corps for personal reasons. He commented, "The 716th Military Police battalion needs a chaplain, and I know you will do a good job." After talking with my wife, I agreed to accept the mission and deployed to Panama where I served with the 716th, nick-named the "Saigon Warriors" for their involvement in the Tet Offense during the Vietnam conflict of 1968.

During the deployment, the installation chaplain who was the Catholic priest at Fort Clayton would periodically invite me into his

office for supervision. He would talk about the chaplain corps and visit with me.

He always asked how I was doing. He had served with the Special Forces in Vietnam and had a heart for ministry with this select group of soldiers.

As my time in Panama was winding down and we were getting ready to return to Ft. Riley, I had a surprise visit from my installation chaplain who had assigned me to the Panama mission. Both he and the installation chaplain of Fort Clayton sat with me and my assistant in his office as we gave them an end of tour brief.

They both thanked us for our service during our deployment. As we were leaving his office, the installation chaplain from Fort Riley asked me to visit with the division chaplain when I returned to Fort Riley. He informed me that I would be reassigned to the division. I didn't quite know what that meant but I was soon to find out.

Upon my return to Fort Riley, I did visit

with the 1st Infantry division chaplain. The division chaplain who was a Catholic priest was an imposing figure. He wore tanker boots that were spit polished. His uniforms were always immaculate, crisp, and pressed, and he had a reputation for being strict. It was not uncommon for him to get on the chaplains if he felt they were not living up to expectations. But on the other hand, he would take all the division chaplains to lunch monthly on his own dime.

I entered his office, and he told me to sit. I wondered why I was there and where I was going to be reassigned. Before I went to Panama, I was serving as a chaplain at a detention center for soldiers who had committed crimes. I had been told this would be my last duty station before processing out of the military.

The chaplain got right down to business and wanted to know why I was leaving the military. I told him it was personal. He did not relent and asked me to explain. I said that though I loved working with soldiers and the command, I believed the chaplain corps was too

political. He responded, “Don’t be naïve— there are politics in any organization.” Then, he went on to instruct me how the corps was set up, and stated that there will “always be a few bad apples in any barrel. If all the good chaplains leave, what do you think we will be left with? How will we minister and provide religious support if we all left due to one or two individuals?”

I wasn’t expecting to get a lecture. Then he said, “We need all types of chaplains in the chaplain corps, of different faiths, persuasions and ethnic diversity.” He suggested I consider our conversation, that I reconsider not leaving the military, and that I come back the next day at 0900 to speak to him.

I left his office feeling confused. I had already made up my mind. I went home; talked with my wife, Christine; prayed, and walked awhile with my soul. Perhaps I had been too much of a *lone chaplain*.

I reported the next day at 0900 to his office. He greeted me and wanted to know what my decision was. I told him I had reconsidered and

that I would serve where he wanted me to. He got on the phone, called the chief of chaplain's office and told them to pull my resignation paperwork, that Chaplain Theodore would not be leaving the chaplaincy. He told me that I was going to be the assistant division chaplain for the 1st Infantry Division. I sat there quietly. I was a young chaplain, and this was a major's slot. I wondered whether it would cause problems with the other brigade chaplains.

My instruction and mentoring as an assistant division chaplain began immediately, and the division chaplain mentored me for over a year. He would call me at home and spend an hour on the phone talking about doctrine and his vision for training the division chaplains. He was constantly instructing and teaching me about our responsibility as war fighters to support the force religiously.

He had a unique way of mentoring the division chaplains. However, his mentoring could, at times, strike fear into those who were about to enter his office. Usually, their first question

to me was, “What’s his mood today?” I would smile and say, “Great!” He was very kind to my young family, inviting and paying for meals at the officer’s club for my family of seven. My kids especially loved this chaplain because they could order whatever they wanted off the menu.

As I progressed in my career, I became more of a team player. I learned and watched how my supervisors would mentor and train young chaplains. I learned to have a trusted mentor within my own denomination, and others who could help me navigate through the career minefields when needed. I learned to trust those who were trustworthy and to love and serve all. It was a maturing process, and one that I was grateful for. I appreciate my supervisors who mentored me when needed, and left me alone when I needed to grow.

I also realized that chaplains usually pick whom they want to be their mentors. You want to have a mentor that you are comfortable with.

Mentorship: Don't Be a Lone Ranger

One of my mentors, Chaplain Donald Hanchett, was always cheerful and made me feel that I was the best of the best. He encouraged me to work hard and to not complain about assignments, but to bloom where I was planted.

When he was the United States Forces Command chaplain, he called me one day as I was finishing an assignment. He asked if I would be interested in going to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. They needed a Lieutenant Colonel chaplain who was jump qualified. I was a bit hesitant, but I agree to go. It was a wonderful tour.

Lessons Learned



- Don't be a lone ranger or a lone chaplain. This image does not sit well with the chaplaincy. On almost all your evaluation reports, your supervisors will comment on

your ability to be a team player. There are many wonderful chaplains who will encourage you with your ministry. Listen to them and learn from them.

- It is important to develop your own style of ministry as a supervisor. Check in weekly with your chaplains in their area of work. Go to them when possible. Don't have them come to you. See how they are doing. Remember it's not about you—it's about them. If they want to talk about career or ministry then listen to them. Most chaplains are not impressed by your rank or your position. They just want to know that you care about them. Hold other meetings where mission tasks are delegated, and religious support coordinated. Get to know your team.
- The chaplaincy is an incredible network of chaplains from various faith traditions with their own personalities. It is a rich fabric that when tightly woven together provides unbelievable opportunities for religious support, growth, and ministry.

Chapter 7



Be a Problem Solver, Not a Problem

As I turned the corner of the unit at Ft. Ord, I saw the commander heading for his office. I wanted to give him a laundry list of what was wrong with the unit. However, before I could tell him about the unit's concerns, he promptly said, "Chaplain, if you don't have a solution for the problems you are about to tell me, I don't want to hear it." I was dumbfounded. How did he know that I was going to talk to him about problems? He taught me a very important lesson that day: don't come to the commander or others about concerns unless you have a solution or at least an idea of how to solve problems.

The next day, I stepped into his office and said, "Sir, we have a problem with drugs in our unit, and here is one idea on how we can at least attempt to fix it." I then detailed a plan about bringing a group of recovering drug addicts for a seminar in the theater where they could tell their story and provide resources where soldiers could receive help. I also coordinated with the training calendar and gave him

dates when this could be accomplished without restricting training. He was pleased with the solution offered, and we executed the plan.

Desert Storm was over, and our unit was preparing to provide security for the cease-fire to be signed in an area south of Basra. As I stepped into the commander's tent, I noticed that he was preoccupied. We had been camped for a few days by the euphrates river. I was asked to speak with the commander on behalf of a young lieutenant who felt unworthy to receive a silver star for valor. The commander and I had a good relationship. We respected one another, and he was very supportive. However, on this day, there was a difference. As I entered his tent, I briefly commented on the issue concerning the lieutenant. Before I could recommend a solution, he exploded in anger. We both were battle weary, and we both said things to each other that we later regretted. Our anger burned for about a week, and then we both apologized to each other and were able to solve the issue.

A lesson learned from this experience was

to assess the situation before sharing a possible course of action. If I had been astute, I would have noticed that the commander was preoccupied. Perhaps I should have first asked “Sir, I notice that you seem worried. Would you like to talk about it?” An approach like this probably would have given him the opportunity to open up.

Another example of assessing the situation before executing a plan was when I was asked by a hospital commander to conduct focus groups for the hospital. As I began the focus group concerning personnel issues that were troubling the staff, I recalled the guidance that I was given by the hospital commander. “Chaplain, I believe we have some toxic leadership on this floor, I would like you to conduct a focus group and to gather staff input of what needs to be done to fix the leadership problem. All input will be confidential. I don’t want to know names.” Having dealt with problems for a few years and understanding the culture of the military, I asked the commander whether

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we could have various focus groups: one for the enlisted, one for the non-commissioned officers, one for the officer nurses, and one for the doctors. He readily agreed, and the process began.

In another incident, my chaplain assistant told me that there was a rumor going around the unit that I had broken the confidentiality of one of the soldiers and that I had reported him to the command for drug concerns. I was crest-fallen.

I held the concept of chaplain confidentiality in the highest regard. I realized that privileged communication resided with the soldiers, but I also understood that losing the trust of soldiers could end my effectiveness in the unit. I knew the soldier he was talking about. He was being chaptered for drug offenses. I also was aware that I could not control what my soldiers said to others. This incident affected my ministry. I wasn't the problem, but sometimes perception can be difficult to change.

Chaplains frequently deal with problems. However, one thing that commanders hate is

to have a chaplain who is a problem. One of the chaplain's primary responsibilities is to advise the commander on ethics, morals and the morale of the unit. If the chaplain has personal concerns, it is difficult for him or her to take care of the families and soldiers of the unit. It also affects morale.

We all struggle and have problems. Chaplains are respected for their compassion and concern for others. As we work and supervise one another, let's be respectful of our differences, and have the courage to help those we supervise, forgive those who offend us, be humble, and pray for those with challenges but at the same time work to maintain the integrity of the chaplain corps.

Lessons Learned



- Chaplains spend a great deal of their time working with problems. Commanders appre-

ciate chaplains who can provide solutions to concerns or issues.

- Dialogue is important and developing a relationship of trust with a command takes time and effort. Nevertheless, providing leadership with solutions to problems is an effective way of providing intentional ministry. Also, understanding the command climate can help you with commanders and leaders. This means to know the situation. What is happening, or what is the context in which the solution to the problem is being presented? How will the commander respond due to mission constraints, resources, time, training, and personality?
- Confidentiality is a cornerstone in a chaplain's ministry. Once lost it is difficult to get back. You cannot control what your soldiers or their family members say to others. However, you can always keep sacred the confidentiality of others. With this said, you may have times in your career when you are disappointed. Always remember what caused

you to come into the chaplaincy. It will sustain and maintain your spirit.

- Being aware of military culture is also very important. Be aware of the different levels of supervision that pertain to enlisted, non-commissioned officers, officers, and rank. Individuals will share with groups of similar rank and culture. However, if there is a power differential, people can shut down. The chaplain is usually seen as an individual of trust who can normally shift between the different cultures. Nonetheless, chaplains need to be aware of how and when their rank may interfere with or assist in ministering to others.
- Finally, on the issue of chaplains as a problem. The best advice is to not be a problem. However, this is simplistic, and life brings with it challenges. Make sure that if you do have a concern to understand that your supervisor will see that you can receive ministry from another chaplain who can provide you confidentiality. Your chaplain supervisor and commander are responsible to main-

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tain the roles, policies, and functions of the military which includes the chaplain corps. If a problem involves the uniform code of military justice, seek legal counsel. Above all else, be the best possible representative of your faith tradition.

Chapter 8



**Keep Your Knees and
Feet Together, and Don't
Reach for the Ground**

How did I get into this situation? I was standing on top of a 34-foot tower at Fort Benning, Georgia where paratroopers were being trained for the Army. I was waiting for the Black-Hat (airborne trainer) to call my number, which was stenciled on my helmet. I could feel the sweat running down my battle fatigues as I nervously waited to jump. There were three of us on the platform waiting for the call. As I watched the Black-Hats, I heard my number called and I nervously jumped from the tower strapped into a harness that simulated the swinging motion of exiting an aircraft.

As I swung back and forth, or oscillated, I could see out of the corner of my eye the Black-Hat, a Gunny from the Marine Corps, looking at me, ready to drop me to the ground. He looked concerned. I understood why! At the ripe age of 43, I was swinging back and forth getting ready to be dropped quickly to the ground. He probably knew that I was a chaplain. He also knew that on my previous drops I

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had not executed a very good parachute landing fall. My feet and knees were apart, and I clumsily rolled on the ground. In other words, it was awkward and each time I hit the ground he probably noticed the grimace of pain on my face due to the jarring nature of the fall. My mind flashed back to when I was a young boy of 10, and how much I enjoyed jumping from the roof of our single-story house. A 10 year-old's body is much more resilient than the body of a 43-year-old.

As I was swinging back and forth, I thought, not fondly, of how my commander had called me into his office for a chat. He was the commander of the School of the Americas. He was a Special Forces Officer from 7th Group, his mission was to train officers from Central and South America on the doctrine, tactics, and policies of the United States Army. He had commanded the 3rd Battalion, 7th Group, in Panama during Just Cause, and had a reputation bordering on legendary. He was an impressive figure standing over six feet tall

with the rugged looks of a Green Beret. He said, "Chaplain, I think you should go to airborne school!" There was a confident air in his statement. It was like, sure you are going, and there will not be any discussion. He continued, "I think it will be fun for you, and it's not that hard. You are in good shape, so it shouldn't be a problem. By the way, in a few of weeks we will be having a competition on the drop-zone to see who can come closest to hitting a big x that will be laid out on the ground." I thought: You must be kidding! He continued, "It will be good for morale." Quickly I replied, "I am too old." "Don't worry about that, I will sign an age waiver for you," and that was the end of our conversation. I went home that day and told Christine, my wife, that I would be enrolled in airborne school for the next three weeks.

As I hit the ground during airborne training, I felt a jarring sensation in my back. I stood up slowly, shook the dirt off my uniform, and was about to return for another trip with the swing landing trainer. However, I heard

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my number called by the Black-Hat, airborne trainer. The Gunnery Sergeant, nicknamed Gunny was on loan from the Marine Corp to train future paratroopers. He told me to come talk with him for a minute. He put his arm around my shoulder and guided me to a part of the training area where our conversation could not be over-heard by the other paratroopers. In a gentle but strong voice, he said, "Chaplain, if you don't keep your knees and feet together you are going to hurt yourself when you parachute out of the C130 (airplane) at 1,200 feet tomorrow. Also, I want you not to reach for the ground with the tips your combat boots. Keep your eyes on the horizon and it will help you to land squarely on the soles of your boots."

Our platoon of prospective paratroopers had heard the stories about this Gunny. They said that he tested parachutes for the Marine Corps, and that a year ago one of the parachutes he was testing had a malfunction. Without much lift, he tumbled to the earth breaking his pelvis in the process. Here he was a year

later, training paratroopers and running with us as if nothing had happened. One of the soldiers in my platoon said that he was harder than woodpecker lips. I didn't really know what that meant. But I could imagine. I must admit that I was impressed with this Gunny. He never yelled at us or called us knuckleheads for getting things wrong. He patiently explained the process of jumping to us, and I never once heard him swear.

Our first jump came too soon, dressed in the uniform of a paratrooper with combat gear, helmet and parachute rigged to jump from a C 130, I waddled up the ramp in a line with other paratroopers to sit uncomfortably on red mesh nylon seats that extended the length against the inside skin of the aircraft on both sides. You could smell the nervousness in the plane. I didn't talk much but waited as the plane began its journey down the runway, and then I felt the plane lift off as 64 paratroopers on a one-way trip prepared to exit the plane over Fryar drop zone at Fort Benning, Georgia. Before I

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jumped, I recalled hearing about a WW II chaplain who while jumping on Fryar drop zone had a parachute malfunction as he jumped from the plane. His parachute deployed in a cigarette roll. It was reported (urban legend) that he hit the drop zone and lay there unmoving. When the airborne trainer came running up to check on the chaplain, expecting him to have passed from this world, the chaplain opened his eyes and said, "When is the next jump?" This story reflects the rough and tumble spirit of the airborne community.

As we approached the drop zone at 1,200 feet, the doors of the C 130 opened on both sides. You could hear the roar of the wind and feel the nervous anticipation of the paratroopers who were getting ready to jump. Much to my surprise the jump master leaned outside the aircraft holding on to both sides of the door and seemed to check for wind conditions. The jump master then turned towards us and it felt like his eyes were just on mine. The command came, "Get ready! "Outboard personnel

stand up!” Our stick of 15 paratroopers stood up in unison. He then said, “In-board personnel stand up!” The other stick of the plane stood up. His next command was, “Hook up!”

We took our static lines from our parachute rig and attached them to a steel cable that would deploy the parachute. “Check static line!” I quickly ran my fingers along the static line to make sure that it wasn’t twisted. Next the jumpmaster yelled, “Check equipment!” This was to make sure our equipment was secure and that we were ready to jump. Whack! I felt the paratrooper hit my right shoulder as he yelled, “Okay!” I then signaled to the paratrooper in front of me with the same whack that my equipment was secure. This ritual proceeded up the stick to the last paratrooper at the front of the line nearest to the jump door, who responded in a loud voice with his right hand energetically extended, “All okay jumpmaster!” We then waited in suspense for the green light to shine and for the jump master to say, “Go!” The word “Go” was heard clearly by

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all, and we put our knees to the breeze, counting to four waiting for our static lines to pull open our parachute.

With an exhilarating pull as the parachute caught air, I checked my canopy for holes, and then came the descent to the ground. Due to weeks of training I checked to know which way the wind was blowing so that I could pull a slip (right or left risers) that would act as an air brake slowing down the parachute. I landed with a jarring thump on the ground, glad that I had completed my first airborne jump. As I lay there, thankful that all my body parts were working, I released my parachute risers, so the wind would not drag me on the ground, gathered up my chute and put it in my parachute kit bag, and ran off the drop zone. This was one of five jumps that we made before we graduated as paratroopers.

Throughout my career, I have always had great respect for trainers like the Black-Hats, Drill Sergeants or Gunnies of the Marine Corps. Their professional demeanor speaks

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volumes about who they are, and what they sacrifice in time and effort to train the men and women of the armed forces so that they can perform their missions when called upon.

After my graduation, my airborne experiences had just begun. Yes, I did participate in the commander's parachute fun jump but was far off the x mark. During the various jumps over the course of six years on jump status I cracked both of my feet. I reached for the ground anticipating the ground and, at times, I did not keep my knees and feet together, which caused a clumsy and sometimes painful parachute landing. I hate to admit it. I wasn't a very good jumper.

Lessons Learned



- We all do things that are hard. Do the soles of our feet or our hearts meet the ground firmly when we are stressed, overcome by

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events, or fail? Do we tiptoe around issues that may cause us angst? Are our spiritual souls grounded? Do we reach for the ground at times, not keeping our sight on what's important? Do we let life distract us? Is our vision securely on the horizon so that we are not side-tracked due to fear of failure, or comparing ourselves to others? Are our knees and feet together so we do not stumble through life? We all want to know which way the wind blows. I was constantly trying to figure out which way the wind blew during a jump so that I could pull the appropriate slip to slow down my descent.

- There are times in life when we feel like we are being dragged, or we need to slow down. If we disconnect our risers after hitting the ground releasing our parachute, we will not let the force of a wind drag us where we don't want to go. In the same way if we forgive others and let go of hard feelings, we will not be pulled this way and that by our emotions or actions.
- The lessons I learned about jumping from

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an airplane and keeping my knees and feet together and not reaching for the ground were invaluable in ministering to others. Perhaps, the symbolic nature of keeping your feet and knees together helps you not stumble through life, and by not reaching for the ground, or getting ahead of events with fear or nervousness, can help you to meet life's challenges.

- Letting life meet you where you are, and not always anticipating events can be less stressful, and healthier for the soul.

Chapter 9



Laughter Is the Best Medicine

After 30 days in Iraq, my uniforms were getting a bit dirty. The weather was hot, and it was obvious that I needed to wash my clothes. Grabbing my 20-gallon plastic tub and some laundry detergent from the back of my High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (Humvee), I dumped all my uniforms and socks, into a plastic tub and began agitating the water with my feet, stomping up and down to get the dirt out of my clothes. Much to my chagrin, the water was turning pink.

Due to a lack of brown socks in local Kansas stores before deployment, my wife, Christine, dyed my socks brown by mixing together purple and green dye. Brown dye was also not available. I forgot about the dyed socks.

Unfortunately, as I hung my uniforms up to dry on a clothesline jerry rigged to my Humvee, I could see that I had a problem. There was no solution. I hoped and prayed that when my uniforms were dry, they would not be pink. However, the remarks from my soldiers told the story. "Hey chaplain, I like your uniform!"

“Where can we get one like yours?” “You’re looking good today, chaplain. Nice!” It went on and on, until after a few washings I was able to get the pink color out of my combat uniforms. This incident provided great fun for the soldiers of my unit. Sometimes, you just have to laugh at yourself.¹

Another humorous incident occurred during that time: I had not had a hot shower for about two months. I would take sponge baths and everyday do my field routine of cleaning and shaving. But, I missed hot showers. Christine came up with a brilliant idea to send me a black plastic solar shower cube that heated the water by the sun. I figured that if I elevated the shower bag and hooked it up to the top of one of the windows of my Hum-vee, hot water could flow out of the attached shower head. I was visiting the medics when I received my shower by snail mail. I was excited and could hardly wait to test it out. However, I

1. These stories were first printed in Ken Alford, ed., *Saints at War: The Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020), 27-30.

received an emergency call, and before I could leave one of the medics was *eyeing* my shower bag. “Hey chaplain, do you think I could borrow it while you are gone?” I replied, “Sure, no problem.” “I will probably be back in about an hour.” I could hardly wait to return. Before long, I returned, and as I was getting out of my Humvee, the medic who had borrowed my shower bag, came running up to me with a look of anguish on his face. I immediately thought that someone was hurt or worse. He said, “I am so sorry!” I was a bit taken aback. I asked, “Why are you so sorry?” From behind his back, he handed me my black plastic shower which was now a melted blob of plastic.

For a moment I was crushed. However, after a quick thought, I said, “Well at least one of us had a hot shower!” We both laughed. I ended up having to wait until the shower truck came around to our unit a couple of months later for that hot shower.

Another humorous story happened soon after the melted shower cube. One day as we

were exiting a wadi in Iraq, we found ourselves in the middle of rounds going off. A platoon of infantry grunts was lighting up a T-72 tank with pastic explosives, and my assistant and I were in the middle of it! I told my driver to hit it, and we exited the danger zone. We were both a bit shook up. I asked my assistant if he was okay. He replied that he was. Meanwhile, I saw the platoon nervously peeking over the top of the wadi. I ran up the hill and one of the platoon members said, “Gee, chaplain, we almost killed you.” I didn’t know what to say. After a few seconds, a few of the platoon members started giggling. Then, we all couldn’t help it, and we all had a hearty laugh, and life continued.

During my time as a new chaplain, and while still learning the art of field craft, the executive officer (XO) of the battalion said, “Chaplain, why don’t you come with us. We are going to do a recon of the area for tomorrow’s tactical battle drills.” I didn’t hesitate. I noticed the XO did not have any gear except

his combat equipment, which did not consist of his rucksack. So, with the battalion commander, the S-3 (planning officer), and the XO, we began to hike through the hills. As it was getting closer to sundown, I began to wonder whether we were going to return to our base camp. This was not to be. The XO stopped our route recon and held a staff meeting. We pulled out our meals ready to eat (MREs), and the planning officer detailed what we would be doing for our tactical battle drills the next day.

Then he said, "Let's get some sleep." I noticed that they each had a butt pack, which was attached to their combat gear. They pulled out their poncho liners and some snivel gear and then they began to bed down for the night. I did not have any gear in my butt pack. I used my butt pack to store an MRE, and my religious equipment like bibles, crosses, etc., to hand out to soldiers. I sheepishly slunk away and found a tree that I could hunker up against for the night. In a balled position, I spent a

sleepless night figuratively kicking myself in the head for not being prepared.

In the morning, the XO commented with a smile, “Chaplain, it looks like you didn’t have a very good sleep.” I could tell that he knew what had happened. We both laughed, and I said, “Well, lesson learned.”

Lessons Learned:



- They say that laughter is the best medicine. Throughout my career, I can honestly say that laughter has been one of my best coping strategies. In staff meetings, when tension is high, a self-deprecating remark can lessen tension. A hearty laugh can break-down barriers, and a smile can always lift another’s heart.
- We are all faced with challenges or dark times in our lives. If we can look at ourselves and laugh, even when the situation is chal-

Laughter Is the Best Medicine

lenging, it helps to lift our spirit. If we don't take ourselves too seriously all the time, life is less stressful.

- We have all been challenged by the mission. We have all worked long hours to meet command demands. However, during these times, if we can let the gift of laughter bless our hearts and lives, it will help us to have a new perspective, make our steps lighter, and keep us grounded in what is important.

Chapter 10



Self Care: Ministry to Self So You Can Help Others

Early in my career, a chaplain showed me a 2 x 3 inch card that had little squares printed around the edges with words on it like: “divorced”, “deployed”, “AWOL” (absence without leave), “whining”, “didn’t promote”, “relationship failed”, “malingerer”, “physical fitness failure”, “Dear Jane/John”, etc.

In the middle in bold letters was printed “**Too Bad.**” I asked the chaplain what the card was for. He said that he used it for counseling.

At the end of a session, he would take a metal hole puncher, put a hole in the category that best represented the concern, and hand the card to the soldier. I thought he was joking, but he assured me that it saved him a lot of time. He said, that “these issues popped up every day, and it was his way of making an impression.” I thought, “How cold.”

He was an older chaplain at the end of his career. He was a Vietnam veteran and had served honorably. I wondered as I exited his office if he was burned out. I would never give a soldier a card like that.

Years later, I sat in my office emotionally and physically drained. I had just finished a pastoral counseling session with a young soldier who had been sexually abused. She was in pain and wanted to know why this had happened. I tried, during the session, to keep my mind focused on her, and to listen, to understand and to validate her emotional pain. However, my mind was floating. How many times had I heard this same situation—the same dynamics, the same confusion. It seemed that I was losing the ability to listen to others. Perhaps I couldn't turn off my heart valve.

In a metaphorical or emotional sense, I was having a heart attack. I was at the end of my career and did something unusual that day—I left work. I wondered, as I exited my office if I was burned out. I wasn't managing my heart value very well. I looked back on the week and thought about the ministry that had occurred. The following narrative is an example:

As I stood on the Air Force runway, waiting with the honor guard to meet a fallen soldier

from Iraq, the tropical trade winds gently softened the heat of the evening. This soldier gave his life for his country and we were there to honor him. I could see a group of the soldier's friends. They were also waiting at the edge of the runway anticipating his arrival. We expectantly waited, in silence—a formation of eight men in two rows.

The casket was lowered from a C-17 Troop Globe Master transport aircraft. The non-commissioned officer in charge gave the command, and we stood at attention dressed in our Class-A uniforms. Suddenly, at 10:00 p.m., we heard TAPs (the final call) being played over the base loud speakers. TAPs are played to signal that the day is done. How appropriate it sounded, playing softly in the background, as we paid tribute to this young man.

I thought back to the week before. The soldier's chaplain emailed me from Iraq and asked me to perform the burial ceremony for this soldier. His parents wanted

him to be buried in the national cemetery close to his unit, so that his comrades in arms could visit him. They had already performed the memorial ceremony in Iraq where his command paid tribute to one of their own. The chaplain had been counseling with this young soldier who was killed, and he had been attending his religious services. He explained to me what a fine young gentleman he was.

He was getting his life back on track. I could feel the sentiment and sadness in his email. My wife and I met the soldier's family the next evening. We attended a family dinner in the home of the chaplain that emailed me from Iraq. The father, mother, brother and grandparents were there. The next day the soldier's fiancée would be arriving for the internment ceremony. You could feel the sadness in the room. They talked about their son, how proud they were of his service to his country. They reminisced about his life. The chaplain's wife was so kind to

them. Her home felt like a comfortable sofa that invited one to relax for a moment from the stresses and worries of life. I pondered about the soldier's chaplain, a kind-hearted man. He was on his third tour of duty. He had served two tours in Iraq and one tour in Afghanistan. He had faithfully served his country, and the men and women of the military for almost eleven years. He had almost three years of combat experience.

We have not seen that type of chaplain service since WWII. I wondered how he was doing. I received another email and phone call that same week from another chaplain who was suffering from personal concerns. He didn't want to talk to his supervisory chaplains because he felt embarrassed. He had served one tour in Iraq and was getting ready to serve another tour. He was such a happy-go-lucky chaplain. He was the one soldiers liked being around. His laugh was infectious, and his humor uplifting. I asked him about his time in Iraq. He commented

that he participated in numerous combat patrols with his men. There was a hint of pride in his voice. I inquired, "What caused you to endanger your life?" He responded that he wanted his men to know that he understood what they were going through.

However, he quickly added, in an anguished voice, that life didn't seem worth living. His wife had separated from him. He missed his children. He agreed to get help. I thought about these two young chaplains. How different they were in their approach to life. What is it that caused one to be resilient and the other to suffer the consequences of fatigue?

After the funeral was over, I returned to my unit to check on a young female soldier. She was traumatized in an incident involving another soldier. We had been counseling together for about a year. She was scared. She later came up positive on a drug test. The command wanted to separate her from the military with a dishonorable discharge.

The command decided to give her one more chance. Over the months of rehabilitation and counseling, to include clinical work, she began to make progress.¹

I wonder how the chaplain corps is doing. I am beginning to think that these incidents are not uncommon. I had the privilege and honor of performing the burial ceremony for the soldier killed in Iraq.

After years of serving in the chaplain corps, I was beginning to understand the chaplain I met many years ago during my first assignment.

Perhaps his counseling card was a sign that he needed help. The Chief of Chaplains in 2008, Douglas Carver, warned the chaplaincy about compassion fatigue. Charles Figley who researched the concept of compassion fatigue defined it as, “the reduced ability of the care-

¹ This narrative about honoring soldiers and the fatigue that chaplains feel as part of their careers was first published as an epilogue in Vance Theodore, “Care Work-Factors Affecting Post 9/11 United States Army Chaplains: Compassion Fatigue, Burn-out, Compassion Satisfaction, and Spiritual Resiliency” (PhD diss., Kansas State University, 2011).

giver to identify and understand the feelings and motives of those with whom they counsel. Because of exposure to traumatic and stressful events, the caregiver has a reduced ability to bear the suffering of others.”²

Years of dealing with traumatic material, whether it is suicide, death and bereavement, divorce, marital issues, post-traumatic stress, combat, honoring the dead, or other issues, can affect the chaplain’s ability in his or her ministry and service to others. Understanding the effects of secondary trauma on the chaplain is critical in maintaining a healthy lifestyle for ministry.

Lessons Learned



- Self-care is perhaps one of the most important lessons you can learn as a care provider

2. Charles R. Figley, “Introduction,” in *Treating Compassion Fatigue*, ed. Charles R. Figley (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 2-3.

so that you can help and minister to others. If the tank is empty, consider how you can refill it.

- Take time to develop a plan for physical, emotional, and spiritual rejuvenation. Realize that the stresses of hearing the traumatic materials of others can affect you.
- Be aware of the symptoms of compassion fatigue: diminished concentration, anxiety, loss of purpose, shut-down, low motivation, withdrawal, inability to hear another's suffering, etc.³
- Learn now how to manage your heart-valve as you spiritually and emotionally care for others.
- Have a trusted mentor with whom you can share and process your traumatic experiences.

3. Charles R. Figley, "Compassion Fatigue as Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder; An Overview," in *Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized*, ed. Charles R. Figley (New York: Routledge, 1995), 8.

Self Care: Ministry to Self So You Can Help Others

- If you spend all your time ministering to others and neglect yourself and your loved ones, your efforts with others could be compromised.
- If you feel that you are fatigued and have difficulty dealing with traumatic events or simply ministering to others, get help.
- Maintain a balance between work, worship, and home and get involved in wholesome recreational activities.

Chapter 11



Prayer: A Guiding Principle

I couldn't believe that we were lost in the desert of Iraq. A chaplain had been requested to visit a signal unit. My assistant and I were given the task and told to shoot an azimuth at 285 degrees for 20 kilometers and we would arrive at our destination. After watching the kilometers go by on the odometer, and paying attention to our azimuth,¹ we reached what we thought should have been our destination. However, there was no unit in sight. We were lost on an ocean of sand with no terrain features. I had a sick feeling. I was shooting the azimuth inside of our Humvee, a vehicle that has metal parts.

With this awareness, I slowly got out of the vehicle, and stood with my head bowed, praying for help. I suddenly got a feeling that I should get back inside the Humvee and shoot a back azimuth. We did this and fortunately arrived at our base camp.

We did visit the unit later and provide religious support. However, I never forgot that experience where we were given divine guid-

1. An azimuth is used to express directions from 0 to 360 degrees on a compass.

Prayer: A Guiding Principle

ance so that we could safely perform our ministry and not be lost.

A favorite story of mine about prayer concerns a battalion commander.

One day the brigade commander walked into the office of one of his battalion commanders. He wanted to talk to him about a certain mission. Upon approaching the commander's office, he told the executive officer (XO) that he was there to see the battalion commander.

The XO replied that the battalion commander was busy. Not to be ignored, the brigade commander quickly opened the battalion commander's door, but as quickly as he opened it, he closed it, and said, "I didn't know he was that type of man." You see the battalion commander was on his knees praying. (author unknown)

This story, probably apocryphal in nature, though pertinent, has a moral. Prayer is a guiding principle.

Prayer: A Guiding Principle

During my career, I was greatly influenced by one of my church leaders who visited me while I was a young chaplain. He counseled me that whenever I was about to enter a commander's office or the office any leader in the military, I should stop for a moment and ask in prayer what our Heavenly Father wanted me to say.

This counsel helped me to center myself when I was hurried, was emotional, or simply did not know what to say. It was an important principle of my ministry as I prayed for help with difficult pastoral counseling, asked for forgiveness, and prayed for guidance.

As a paratrooper, I don't know how many times I and other paratroopers practiced the parachute skills for exiting an airplane. Rarely was there a time when I wasn't asked to give a prayer of safety for the men and women who were jumping with me that day.

I didn't know all their religious preferences or whether they were religious at all. I tried to be respectful of the audience I was praying for, in order to uplift rather than offend.

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As a chaplain, you will be asked by service members to pray for them. Perhaps for many this is just a mantra, and for others it is said with sincerity. When asked to pray specifically for an individual, I would write down his or her full name and what they wanted me to pray about. Often, when soldiers came into my office and requested a prayer, I would respond with “I would be glad to pray for you.”

There are times when prayer needs to be inclusive in nature. Today in the military, chaplains need to be sensitive to the religious beliefs or non-religious beliefs of others. Many will not share your Christian faith tradition.

Air Force Chaplain Steve Jensen gives the following advice concerning prayer in a large group or command setting. This ecumenical way of praying helps him to stay true to his own conscience:

Before I pray, I preface my prayer with “Please join me in prayer according to your own conscience or faith tradition.” I then open the prayer with “Heavenly Father”

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or something similar. In the body of the prayer, I sometimes use quotes from Church leaders like: “A wise man once said...” I do this as the spirit directs.

To close the prayer, rather than using any of the popular adages such as “in your holy name,” I will pause and say in my mind “in the name of Jesus Christ” before saying out loud “Amen.”

For example, the closing of a typical prayer for me will sound like this: “...I humbly pray,” (pause for 2 to 3 seconds), and close with “Amen.”

This lets those in attendance in their own minds add in what they are comfortable with from their own faith or spiritual perspective in closing the prayer. I at the same time add what I am comfortable with from my Christian tradition.

I have received positive feedback from commanders and participants in command and other nonvoluntary functions in using this format.

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Restorative prayer is another concept that is an important principle of ministry. Prayer helps one to center one's day. It can calm one's fears, guide one according to inspiration, and helps one focus on what is important.

Lessons Learned



- Prayer is a powerful aspect of ministry. Use it daily in the command and for those you serve in providing religious support and pastoral counseling.
- Prayer, restorative in nature, can guide and help you in your daily ministry to others. It can be a source of healing and strength. It can be the simplest yet most profound aspect of your ministry.
- Be sensitive to others when you pray in groups or command functions that are not voluntary worship services. Many can feel a part of, and have more appreciation for prayers that are general in nature.

Prayer: A Guiding Principle

- James Montgomery penned the words to *Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire* which I believe appropriately expresses, as a guiding principle, the sentiment of prayer in a chaplain's life and ministry.

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered, or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.*

*Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.*

*Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try,
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.²*

2. *Book of Worship for United States Forces: A Collection of Hymns and Worship Resources for Military Personnel of the United States of America* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), nos. 93, 104.

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About the Author



Chaplain (Colonel) Vance P. Theodore (*U.S. Army Retired*) served with honor the men and women in uniform as an Army chaplain.¹ Most of his career was spent with units in combat arms.

He currently is the associate graduate coordinator at Brigham Young University in the Master of Arts Chaplaincy program.

He is married to the former Christine Clark of Kensington, California. They have 5 children and 13 grandchildren.

¹The graphic pictured above is the Chaplain Regimental Crest for the United States Army Chaplaincy.